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## Place-Based Education and Reconciliation

### Abstract

This action research project examined the impact of a place-based learning opportunity on Haida Gwaii for Christian educators. Two separate groups participated. The first group of 10 participants came to Haida Gwaii in the summer of 2017. The second group of 10 participants came to Haida Gwaii in the summer of 2018. Both groups were given the same opportunity to take part in various events, visit locations, and meet Haida people. All but one participant from both groups were interviewed separately in the spring of 2019 to collect data on each's experience. One participant did not respond to requests for an interview. The data indicates having a place-based learning opportunity provides educators with enthusiasm for improving their own teaching of Indigenous content and perspectives and for connecting them with local Indigenous communities, in the hopes of having more meaningful relationships with these same communities.

### Document Type

Thesis

### Degree Name

Master of Education (MEd)

### Department

Graduate Education

### First Advisor

Patricia C. Kornelis

### Keywords

Master of Education, thesis, place-based education, Haida Gwaii, Indigenous peoples, Christian teachers

### Subject Categories

Curriculum and Instruction | Education

### Comments

Action Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Education

Placed-Based Education and Reconciliation

by

Jonathan Boone

B.A. Trinity Western University, 1995

Action Research Project  
Submitted in Partial Fulfilment  
of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Education

Department of Education  
Dordt University  
Sioux Center, Iowa  
August 2019

Place-Based Learning and Reconciliation

by

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September 4, 2019  
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September 4, 2019  
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### **Acknowledgments**

I want to express my gratitude and appreciation to all the participants for venturing out to Haida Gwaii in the summers of 2017 and 2018. It was a pleasure to spend time with each of you in this majestic setting and learn with you. Finally, thank you to Karin, without whom this research paper would literally have not been completed. Haa'wa, dang ga dii k'uuga ga.

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### **Abstract**

This action research project examined the impact of a place-based learning opportunity on Haida Gwaii for Christian educators. Two separate groups participated. The first group of 10 participants came to Haida Gwaii in the summer of 2017. The second group of 10 participants came to Haida Gwaii in the summer of 2018. Both groups were given the same opportunity to take part in various events, visit locations, and meet Haida people. All but one participant from both groups were interviewed separately in the spring of 2019 to collect data on each's experience. One participant did not respond to requests for an interview. The data indicates having a place-based learning opportunity provides educators with enthusiasm for improving their own teaching of Indigenous content and perspectives and for connecting them with local Indigenous communities, in the hopes of having more meaningful relationships with these same communities.

*Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I may remember. Involve me and I learn.*

Whether Benjamin Franklin ever penned this perceptive proverb or not is debatable. What is not debatable, and what is far more helpful for Christian educators, is the principle it points to: the more involved one is in their learning, the more effective one's learning is likely to be. However, this proverb also raises questions: what does it mean to be involved in one's learning, and to what end is learning directed in the first place?

Christian education ought to be considered as a formative project, as opposed to a merely informative exercise (Smith, 2011). Dismissing the idea that humans are defined as primarily rational, knowing beings by which the educational enterprise feeds one information, Smith (2011) contends humans are *loving beings* first and foremost. Based on this premise, it is not surprising that when one is simply told what it is they are going to learn apart from having a relationship to the subject of object of inquiry, or if one's learning is limited to only reaching the rational, cerebral aspects of knowing and being, one's learning will not be transformative in nature. At best, this approach to teaching and learning will result in students who may have a Christian perspective of the object or subject of their inquiry in their minds but will not necessarily be transformed in practice by their learning. Thus, the goal of Christian education must be to raise responsive disciples of Jesus Christ who take the healing power of his Gospel to all areas of creation because they love God, they love humanity, and they love the world God has given to them.

## **The Problem**

Canada has a responsibility to address the strained and damaged relationship with its Indigenous population (*Final Report*, 2015). Call to Action 63 addresses the need for educational systems across Canada to improve their teaching of the failed residential school system in particular, as well as their teaching of Indigenous history in general. Of particular importance is the call to develop better intercultural understanding, empathy and mutual respect for Indigenous people and cultures within educational settings.

One area where Christian education in British Columbia (BC) has struggled to have a transformative impact is in its very relationship to Indigenous people. For too long, teaching and learning in BC's Christian schools has been *about* the Indigenous peoples of Canada and the province. This has had the unfortunate effect of treating a marginalized and oppressed people group as a mere subject matter that is limited to the world of textbooks, worksheets, and other cerebral pedagogies. Inevitably, students are not taught to see these people as fellow image-bearers, part of living and dynamic cultures that are beginning to reclaim and celebrate their cultures, languages and self-determination. Tragically, at the very point of intersection between the Christian school and the Indigenous culture where schools could partner with Indigenous neighbours and walk with them on this necessary journey, the school inevitably moves on to the next topic of study. Regrettably, the opportunity to get involved and develop meaningful relationships rooted in a love of God and neighbour passes. If Christian schools are going to take seriously the call to build better intercultural understanding, empathy, and respect towards Indigenous peoples as a transformative task, it is clear that more needs to be done than what the present status quo allows for.

### **Research Questions**

If the classroom is limited in its ability to create a disposition towards transformative discipleship in students, then it is safe to assume the same is true for educators as well (Smith, 2011). The key to creating this disposition toward transformative discipleship is through place-based learning opportunities where effective hands-on activities in culturally appropriate, natural settings with Indigenous people will contribute effectively to building cultural understanding (Semchison, 2001). In contrast, the present educational institution's normative pedagogies and very way of being not only limits exploration of places and cultures, but also inadvertently reinforces isolation from these cultures as well by being confined to a classroom, building and location.

Recognizing that a merely cerebral approach to learning and educating about Canada's Indigenous peoples falls short of what Christian education ought to accomplish, this researcher invited 10 other Christian school educators from across the province to join him on a place-based learning experience on Haida Gwaii in the summer of 2017. The deep hope of this trip was that by being present and becoming involved in the Haida culture for a brief period of time, these same educators would be empowered to find ways in their own educational settings to involve their students and schools with the local Indigenous people in their own neighbouring communities. Following up on the success of the 2017 trip, another trip to Haida Gwaii was offered to another 10 Christian school educators in the summer of 2018 for the same purpose as the 2017 trip, to determine if these trips would meet this deep hope.

The research questions for this study were as follows:

- 1) What is the effect of a place-based learning opportunity on educational practice?
- 2) How might the effect of a placed-based learning opportunity be used to improve relations with Indigenous peoples?

### **Definition of Terms**

The following definitions are provided to ensure uniformity and understanding of these terms throughout the study. The researcher developed all definitions not accompanied by a citation.

**Indigenous:** For the purposes of this study, the term '*Indigenous*' refers to First Nations, Inuit and Metis people who have continuously inhabited the land now called Canada. In this regard, the term reflects the Canadian government's use of the term 'Aboriginal' as imbedded in the Canadian Constitution, 1982.

**Haida Gwaii:** The 150+ island archipelago home of the Haida people, approximately 100 kilometers off the western-most coast of Canada in British Columbia. Haida Gwaii translates as "the islands of the Haida people" and replaces the colonial misnomer "Queen Charlotte Islands" that came into popular use with the advent of Euro-Canadian settlers.

**Place-based learning:** For the purposes of this study, and in contrast to a conventional classroom setting, place-based learning refers to the hands-on, field-trip type experience where educator-participants spend time meeting, conversing, and learning from Indigenous peoples while on location in Haida Gwaii.

**Reconciliation:** The process or journey by which mutually respectful relationships are established and maintained. (*Final Report*, 2015)

**Colonization:** For the purposes of this research paper, colonization refers to the process by which Canada has exerted overwhelming legal and social influence and control over Canada's Indigenous peoples, leading to their marginalization within the broader society.

**Decolonization:** For the purposes of this paper, decolonization is the process by which Canada's history and relationship to Indigenous peoples is reframed to allow Indigenous peoples to provide their perspectives.

### **Literature Review**

Scully (2012) indicates that place-based education has the potential to foster improved cross-cultural understanding and reconciliation between settlers and Indigenous people of Canada, while also addressing other related goals pertaining to Indigenous education that are beyond the scope of the present study. Recognizing that current educational practices and patterns only serve to reinforce a Euro-Canadian centric perspective that further isolates and even stereotypes Indigenous peoples, Scully (2012) calls for teacher education programs to include place-based learning opportunities that will not only build an awareness of Indigenous peoples and cultures, but will also help these same educators become decolonized in the process. Colonization is understood to be a catchall phrase for the all-encompassing way in which a dominant group exerts oppressive influence and power over another group – in this case, through the educational systems of Ontario. Presumably, this applies to the rest of Canada, and British Columbia, in particular, as well. It is an unquestioned assumption in Scully (2012) that colonization serves as a major obstacle to forming right relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. However, what constitutes “right relations” are not defined by Scully. The restoration of equality as a definition for right relations (Gebhard, 2017) is

not helpful, as it assumes that right relations based on equality once existed between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. Understanding and committing to right relations as a form of *reconciliation* – a process of “establishing and maintaining respectful relationships” (*Final Report*, 2015) provides an impetus for tangible action that moves beyond mere good intention and encourages place-based education experiences such as the focus of this present research proposal.

Scully’s (2012) research is a self-described self-study based on her years of teacher-education training at Lakehead University in northwestern Ontario. Her research is described as being comprised largely of informal data collection via student feedback through years of teaching, reading, and reflection on her part. Despite these limitations, her observations reinforce the conviction that for education to be transformative in nature (Smith 2011), it is essential to have educators be immersed in the Indigenous cultures that are the subjects of their study. Missing from Scully is the important consideration of the effect of place-based immersion on *other* educators (and for my purposes -Christian educators in particular), and how such placement can equip them to better improve their students’ intercultural understandings, empathy and mutual respect for Indigenous people.

Contemporary discourses in Canadian education about Indigenous peoples and their experiences in residential schools do not contribute to actual reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (Gebhard, 2017). Good intentions on the part of educators are inadequate for effective decolonization. Simply removing oppressive and colonial narratives inevitably only serves to continue the racialization of Canada’s Indigenous peoples. Despite the apparent need for new discourses that will challenge

current colonial realities and thus achieve reconciliation, it is still important to teach about Canada's failed residential school system within the colonial educational systems. While clarifying that the intention of this research study was not to develop strategies for educators to use in their classrooms (since there are no easy answers), interestingly Gebhard (2017) does point to the need for better teacher training and curriculum development to hopefully prevent continued racialization.

While educating Canadians on the failed residential school movement as a means to achieving reconciliation between Canada and its Indigenous population has received widespread national priority with the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (*Final Report*, 2015), this process also involves unlearning the assumptions of traditional Euro-Canadian education that assumes cultural superiority and perhaps, even racism (Battiste, 2013). This unlearning process is known as decolonization and is the focal point of Battiste's 2013 publication *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit*. Canadians may find her work challenges their comfortable perception of Canada as a just, tolerant and open society, but it is an important voice for any educator seeking to learn how to better equip themselves and their students for the important work of reconciliation. Indeed, she refers to the important work of decolonizing education as an act that will benefit not only Indigenous students, but all ultimately all students. (Battiste, 2013, p.14). Whereas Gebhard (2017) does not provide educators with solutions on how to improve their practice, Battiste (2013) concludes her work with a chapter dedicated to the possibilities of educational transformations that educators can commit themselves to if they are to implement practical ways in which they teach about Canada's First Nations people. Her central conclusion – that Canada's educational

systems have omitted Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing, is deeply appreciated and insightful. As a limitation, her recommendations and findings are directed toward the teaching of Indigenous students in the classroom themselves. While this is helpful (and necessary) for those educators who find themselves in this type of educational context, it does not necessarily equip the Christian educator that is the focus of my own current research proposal. Further, Battiste (2013) only concerns herself with addressing those who find themselves in Canada's provincially controlled public school systems, overlooking or perhaps not even mindful of those within the independent Christian school movement who also desire to overcome the shortfalls and omissions of their own school systems, in the hopes that they may contribute to the betterment of relationships between themselves, their students, and Indigenous communities.

Focusing on how educators can address the missed opportunities for reaching their Indigenous learners, Kanu (2011) calls on these same educators to be more accommodating of Indigenous perspectives, for the direct benefit of not only the Indigenous learners, but also their wider communities. Her research identifies the disengagement between home and school as a major contributor to the failure and low performance of today's public school Indigenous students (Kanu, 2011, p. 59), while also providing a historical overview of Canada's oppressive and failed assimilationist policies, residential schools, broken treaty promises, and general neglect and marginalization of Indigenous peoples as contributing factors as well. Unlike other studies, Kanu (2011) argues that incorporating Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum will benefit all learners in Canada's public schools, since Indigenous peoples (and elders in particular) have much to offer in areas such as ecological knowledge. Basing her research on three

urban schools with sizable Indigenous populations, Kanu (2011) discovered that where educational systems were intentional about incorporating Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum, these students had improved test scores and self-confidence. As valuable as this resource is for improving the education of Canada's Indigenous students, and perhaps even presumably leading to the establishment of right relations (Gebhard, 2017) between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, like so many of the research studies in this field, its focus assumes a public school setting, and is targeted towards improving the educational outcomes of Indigenous students themselves. These are all very valuable and noteworthy studies that make important contributions to the field of education. Perhaps, in an indirect way, they will also contribute to the establishment of improved relations between these same educational institutions and Indigenous communities in Canada, and even British Columbia. Yet, there is a clear deficit of research studies committed to understanding and improving the relationship between independent, Christian school educators and the establishment of right relationships with neighbouring Indigenous communities through immersive experiences in those very communities.

Yet, there is clear value in a place-based learning experience when educating Indigenous pre-service teachers in their education training programs (Kitchen & Hodson 2013). Recognizing the need to have culturally fluent and competent Indigenous teachers to help meet the educational and cultural needs of their respective students and communities, a university in Ontario devised a Bachelor of Education program that made these very goals its priority. Interestingly, the university staff in this teacher education program who are credited with being culturally sensitive and able to promote a strong sense of self in their Indigenous pre-service teachers were not all of Indigenous ancestry.

Yet, given their intentional commitment to avoiding an assimilative approach into mainstream Euro-centric culture, and the commitment to maintaining a culturally sensitive “pedagogy of relations” (Kitchen & Hodson, 2013, p.145) with the Indigenous community, Kitchen & Hodson indicate that through meaningful intercultural contact, educators can be equipped to build positive relationships when given the opportunity to be immersed in a different culture. While the focus in Kitchen & Hodson’s study is on the (mostly) non-Indigenous educators’ successful and effective relationship to Indigenous pre-service teachers, it illustrates a crucial point: right relations (reconciliation) can be accomplished when educators are immersed and sympathetic to Indigenous cultures.

### **Methodology**

The 10 Christian educator 2017 summer participants in this research study were self-selected by means of their interest and willingness to participate in this place-based learning experience on Haida Gwaii. Eight of the ten were females; two were male. Of the ten, nine are of Euro-Canadian ancestry, and one is Mohawk. Three were colleagues of this researcher from Bulkley Valley Christian School, a small K-12 school in Smithers. One is a middle school campus administrator from a large urban school in Richmond, one is a high school administrator from suburban Langley. Another is a primary teacher from Duncan Christian School on Vancouver Island, one is a high school teacher from Surrey Christian School, a large suburban school near Vancouver. One was a recent graduate from Trinity Western University’s education program, another participant was a Director of Learning from the Society of Christian Schools in B.C. The final participant was a public-school Christian educator from a large high school in Victoria, B.C.

The summer 2018 participants were required to apply for an opportunity to participate in the 2018 trip to Haida Gwaii. See Appendix A for a copy of this application. Further, 2018 participants were required to be members of the Christian Educators of BC and be employed in a member school of the Society of Christian Schools of BC. Nine participants were selected from the applications at the discretion of this researcher. The tenth participant is the spouse of this researcher and served as the co-facilitator for logistical purposes. Of these nine participants, seven were female and two were male. Eight are of Euro-Canadian ancestry, and one is Cree. The nine participants include a recently retired elementary principal from Langley, two elementary classroom teachers from Langley, a high school practical arts teacher from Nanaimo, two elementary teachers from Vancouver, an intermediate classroom teacher from Duncan, a high school arts teacher from Surrey, and a recent education graduate from Trinity Western University in Langley, B.C. Finally, the co-facilitator is employed as a part-time Special Education Assistant at Bulkley Valley Christian School in Smithers, B.C.

### **Materials and Procedure**

All participants were encouraged to keep a daily journal while participating in the Haida Gwaii trip. The purpose of this was to help them identify their emotions and experiences while they were on Haida Gwaii, and to also provide an unofficial record for each one to refer to after the trip. This journaling would help them prepare for the questions they would later be asked in the interview. To further help each participant prepare, the interview questions contained in Appendix B were forwarded to each participant a couple of weeks in advance of the interviews. Each interview was recorded

and transcribed after receiving a signed and dated Interview Consent Form, as found in Appendix C.

With the exception of five participants from the Smithers area who were able to be interviewed in person, fourteen interviews were conducted via technology by utilizing Skype, Zoom, or Facetime. One participant from 2018 was unable to commit to an interview. All 19 interviews form the data that has been analyzed and presented for consideration in this final report. For the sake of anonymity, participants from the summer of 2017 are referred to as participants A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I and J. Participants from the summer of 2018 are referred to as participants K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, and S.

## **Results**

In a phenomenological study, the data collection should be as non-directed as possible in order to allow participants to provide a detailed description of the phenomenon as they experienced it, free from the guided direction of the researcher (Waters 2017).

### **Interview Question One**

The purpose of the first interview question was to provide a “big picture” view of each participant’s overall experience of the Haida Gwaii trip. From these responses, two dominant themes emerged. First, there was a high degree of meaning and enjoyment in taking part in a place-based, experiential learning opportunity. Second, there was high regard for the opportunity to meet and interact with local Haida people.

**Experiential Learning.** All participants expressed gratitude and joy at the opportunity to visit Haida Gwaii and to experience the people, places, and culture of the islands. The geographical isolation and the physical beauty of the islands, in particular, made an impact on participants, as indicated by Participant S: “It was like a pilgrimage, like you’re going to the edge of the world, so it was just naturally and breathtakingly beautiful” (S’s interview, 06-25-2019). In a similar way, Participant R remarked, “It felt like I was in a completely different world, but I was still in B.C. I hadn’t left the province, yet it felt like I had left the continent” (R’s interview, 06-11-2019). Participant N summed up this aspect of the trip by simply stating, “It’s a beautiful, beautiful place” (N’s interview, 07-02-2019). Reflecting on her own experience, Participant F stated, “The whole time I was there I was just really cognizant that this is something that not everyone gets to do! It was amazing!” (F’s interview, 05-01-2019).

Interestingly, several participants compared this manner of learning with more conventional ways of learning in a typical classroom. Participant I stated:

I’m a believer of experiential learning, so this is a great example of experiencing something; all the senses are engaged: you can see, you can smell, you can taste, you touch, you could see how their villages were hundreds of years ago, and that- you know, you can’t replace that with a textbook or whatever. (I’s interview, 05-01-2019)

Echoing this sentiment, Participant R put it this way, “We were seeing it, we were hearing it, we were smelling it; we ate it, we felt it. One of the reasons I really wanted to go was to actually experience it in bodily form, not just in my head” (R’s interview, 06-11-2019). Participant K expressed her experience this way:

I enjoyed being immersed in the Haida Gwaii culture and just being able to see how people live on Haida Gwaii and experience their hospitality and hear them share their stories with us, and just to get a taste of their history by visiting the different (places) that we went to. I had a chance to see the spectacular beauty Haida Gwaii, to reflect and kind of soak in the experience versus sitting in the classroom just learning and digesting, to live it for a little while and experiencing it that way. (K's interview, 06-25-2019)

Participant E was very succinct: "It helped me grow more than I've ever grown in my whole life" (E's interview, 04-24-2019).

**Relational Learning.** A significant aspect of this learning experience was providing participants the opportunity to meet local Haida people, whether young or old, in a variety of settings. One unplanned part of the trip involved spending several hours in a remote location being sheltered from torrential rains thanks to the hospitality of two elders (known as Watchmen) who lavished food, conversation and gifts on participants. This made quite an impression on the participants, as evidenced by Participant I's comment: "The Haida Watchmen- that was pretty compelling too, to be with them. When we were sitting with them in their cabin there, having lunch, sharing some stories with them, it was really important too" (I's interview, 04-30-2019). An especially touching moment was made between participant E and one of these same Haida Watchmen elders. Participant E had recently been widowed and had carried some of her husband's ashes for dispersal on Haida Gwaii, as per his wishes. At the Watchmen's invitation, Participant E was encouraged to spread them near this same cabin where participants were sheltered from the inclement weather. Reflecting on this event,

Participant E commented in her interview, “I’ve grown so much since that time, and, and I’m still growing” (E’s interview, 04-24-2019).

It was especially enjoyable and moving to meet young Haida people in particular. Participant D commented that he was inspired by “the impact of meeting a young carver” as well as “the two young ladies that toured us around” by providing a highly engaging interpretive walk around a local lake of cultural significance to the Haida (D’s interview, 05-06-2019). Likewise, Participant G commented that it was “really interesting for me to be in a setting where a lot of the young people we interacted with were proud of their culture and so knowledgeable of their culture” (G’s interview, 05-01-2019). Participant H noted that she was personally inspired by “the young people, how proud they were of their culture, how they were working to preserve their language, their environment, their culture” (H’s interview, 04-25-2019). Participant C stated rather succinctly, “It was a privilege to meet Haida young people” (C’s interview, 04-23-2019). For participant O, “The one-on-one stories from (Haida) people were probably the most valuable” (O’s interview, 06-25-2019), and for Participant L, “the most impactful experiences were the ones where we were directly interacting with the people that live there. I think that has the most impact on what I remember” (L’s interview, 06-26-2019).

### **Interview Question Two**

The purpose of the second interview question was to determine how much or how little participants knew of Indigenous culture prior to the Haida Gwaii trip. As might be expected, there was a wide range of responses to this question. On the one end, several participants (K, M, and O) confessed to having no or very little significant contact with

Indigenous people, culture or learning. As Participant M simply stated, “I do not know a lot” (M’s interview, 06-25-2019).

At the other end of the spectrum, some participants had greater exposure and interactions with both Indigenous people and learning due to their personal interests, school populations, or other circumstances. For example, Participant A has had extensive interactions with a wide range of Indigenous people over many years, culminating in this articulation: “My understanding is that Indigenous cultures are diverse and dynamic, carried and protected through a history of oppression and assimilation” (A’s interview, 04-30-2019). Likewise, Participants P and J teach at a school with a sizable and growing Indigenous minority population, thus giving them insight and understanding they may not have otherwise had, but were appreciative of nonetheless.

The majority of participants in the middle of these two extremes all indicated their knowledge and understanding was limited to more cerebral, arms-length knowledge such as that described by Participant F, “My knowledge of indigenous culture was mostly from museums and books...a few workshops on residential schools and books and videos” (F’s interview, 05-01-2019). Another participant, R, described his understanding of Indigenous people as “abstract” (R’s interview, 06-11-2019). Not surprisingly, in describing her previous knowledge of Indigenous people and culture, Participant L admitted to feeling “very insecure about what it really meant and how to best understand it. It felt like it was just from textbooks or the media” (L’s interview, 06-26-2019).

Understandably, the two Indigenous participants (Participant E is Mohawk and Participant N is Cree) did not feel it was necessary (or even possible!) to answer question 2 or 3.

### **Interview Question Three**

The purpose of interview question 3 was to determine if the participants recognized any change or growth in their own understanding of Indigenous people and culture as a result of the trip. Not surprisingly, all the participants, including those who regarded themselves as having a decent amount of knowledge and understanding, indicated greater understanding of Indigenous culture in general, and Haida culture in particular as a result of the trip. In comparing her before-and-after understanding, Participant H indicated she now sees Indigenous people and culture as “a *living* culture more than even as an historical one” (H’s interview, 04-25-2019). Likewise, Participant S admitted that while he had “a pretty good understanding of the different cultures of BC and Canada and North America” prior to the trip, he now realized “it would have been a less intimate understanding” due to not having had the opportunity to meet Indigenous people and experience their culture firsthand in the setting of the Haida Gwaii trip (S’s interview, 06-25-2019).

Participants were also realistic in not over-estimating their ability to understand a culture as a result of a single, 10-day trip. Participant L noted this limitation when she stated, “I still don’t know a whole lot. It opened my eyes that there’s a lot that I don’t know” (L’s interview, 06-26-2019).

### **Interview Question Four**

The purpose of interview question four was to determine what (if any) effect the Haida Gwaii trip had on the actual everyday educational practices of the participants. This is the most important part of the trip, and thus the most important question in the interview as well. Participants indicated a strong desire to be intentional about

incorporating Indigenous content and perspectives into their educational practices. What this actually looks like varied between participants.

For example, some participants indicated the Haida Gwaii trip gave them the courage to simply take steps towards more inclusion of First Nations content and perspectives into their curriculum. This is not to suggest the interest was not there prior to the Haida Gwaii trip, but instead they felt they did not know where to start or how to begin. Now, as a result of meeting Haida people and learning about their culture, these participants felt empowered to take steps towards being more inclusive. For example, one stated, “I can step forward and I don’t have to fear the topic so much; I think a lot of our teachers are feeling that they want to ‘do Indigenous stuff’ but they don’t have the tools and I feel like I have something that can get me going, and that will continue long term” (L’s interview, 06-26-2019). In a similar manner, Participant O indicated a greater degree of confidence: “I’m much more comfortable approaching my projects from a First Nations perspective” as a result of the trip (O’s interview, 06-25-2019). Likewise, Participant K indicated that as a result of the trip “she was a lot more willing to discuss this with my students” (K’s interview, 06-25-2019). For others, the challenge was to simply take what they have learned and put it into practice, as stated by Participant C: “Now I have had an experience that has turned my (prior) head knowledge to heart knowledge so that I can share what I have learned with substance, reality and excitement!” (C’s interview, 04-23-2019). Looking ahead, Participant G indicated she would be “intentional about inclusion and reconciliation and all the goals of the trip” when she would eventually be placed in her own classroom setting (G’s interview, 05-01-2019).

For others, the Haida Gwaii trip encouraged them to be more sensitive and culturally mindful. For example, Participant A indicated a desire to “teach my courses in a way that honors different ways of learning” (A’s interview, 04-30-2019), and Participant H indicated a desire to be “sensitive in not speaking for a culture that I really do not fully understand” (H’s interview, 04-25-2019). For others, there was a new awareness and a questioning of what colonization has done to Indigenous communities, as reported by Participant M: “In going to Haida Gwaii, it made me rethink that mentality that if I’m teaching about communities, I have to make sure I’m not touting contact as the impetus for all development” (M’s interview, 06-25-2019).

Other participants have been able to take more tangible, concrete steps towards including Indigenous perspectives and content into their practices. For many of these participants, this includes things like “We had elders come to the classroom” (F’s interview, 05-01-2019), going on field trips to local communities, using Indigenous resources, textbooks and learning materials to “building relationships with Indigenous people by reaching out and connecting to them” (P’s interview, 05-18-2019).

Other participants reported being able to take more dramatic steps towards incorporating Indigenous content and materials into their classrooms. For example, because he feels more comfortable with Indigenous content as a result of the trip, Participant O initiated a very successful cross-curricular project with several colleagues in which young high school students ultimately designed and crafted their own cedar paddles with local Indigenous input. This was well-received by students, who demonstrated strong interest in the learning and the doing of this project. Still others took a different approach: “I saw a change in the way our school relates to the Kwantlen

because I actually went and drove down there and met with the people there” (N’s interview, 07-02-2019).

Several participants in administrative leadership positions have been able to bring their new learning directly to their staff in various ways. Participant B reported that as a result of her learning and experiences on her Haida Gwaii trip, she now “dedicates a big chunk of time in our curriculum meetings every Thursday to just unpacking what we understand about First Nations’ ways of being and knowing” (B’s interview 05-06-2019). Similarly, Participant I has been “more intentional about promoting and working with my staff in finding Indigenous connections in the curriculum” as a result of the impact of the Haida Gwaii trip in 2017 (I’s interview, 04-30-2019). This intentionality included taking some of his staff on an Indigenous-led field trip with local elders as a way to learn from Indigenous ways of being. Connected to this, Participant I also encouraged Participant N to participate in the summer of 2018. As a result of her experience of the trip, and because of Participant I’s intention in making his school more successful at reconciliation, Participant N has now been appointed as her school’s inaugural Indigenous Chair of Learning for their combined K-12 school campus.

In a similar but more dramatic way, Participant J decided to apply what she learned and experienced to her own geographical and cultural context by replicating the Haida Gwaii trip into a place-based learning experience for other Christian educators interested in reconciliation. This successful week-long trip on Vancouver Island took place in July 2019.

Participant D cautioned that successful reconciliation with Indigenous people must be about more than just content. To be successful, it must also include “learning

*from* and learning *with* Indigenous people, and in order to do that, there needs to be a relationship” (D’s interview, 05-06-2019).

### **Discussion**

Christian education in BC has struggled to have a transformative impact in its relationship to Indigenous people. The Final Report of the Truth & Reconciliation Report (2015) calls on educators to develop better intercultural understanding, empathy and mutual respect for Indigenous people and cultures within their educational settings. Place-based learning is recognized as an effective means to build and gain greater understanding of Indigenous cultures (Semchison, 2001). While there has been increased attention on training teachers to better educate all students on Indigenous people and cultures (Scully, 2001) and even on equipping teachers to teach Indigenous students themselves (Gebhard, 2017), there has been no research or study into how Christian teachers in independent schools in BC might become more effective at reconciliation.

The purposes of this study were two-fold: to determine what effect place-based learning has on educational practice, and secondly, to determine what effect place-based learning has on improving relations with Indigenous people. The deep hope of this researcher was that these effects (if any) would lead to effective reconciliation between Christian educators and their schools and Indigenous peoples. It is clear from the data collection that these educators (referred to as participants) were positively impacted by their experiences during their trip, that they grew in their knowledge and understanding of Indigenous cultures, and most importantly, that they took (or committed themselves to taking) various and differing steps towards being more open to Indigenous content, materials and perspectives in their respective educational contexts after the trip. These

steps included a wide range of initiatives, from simply having the courage to present Indigenous materials to students, to inviting local Indigenous people directly into the classroom, to the creation of a new faculty position on Indigenous learning, and to a replication of the Haida Gwaii trip itself in a different geographical location for the same purposes.

In conclusion, it is the conviction of this researcher that providing a place-based learning opportunity for Christian educators in an Indigenous setting such as Haida Gwaii is an effective catalyst for reconciliation – the establishment and maintenance of right relations between Indigenous people and communities – in this case, Christian education communities. To God be the glory!

### **Limitations**

The researcher recognizes there are limits to this study. One obvious limitation is that the participants who committed their time, finances and other resources to the Haida Gwaii trip were already predisposed to improving their understanding and teaching of Indigenous people and cultures and were already committed to reconciliation. A future study might try to find a reasonable way to bring disinterested and or indifferent participants, or perhaps all the educators of a particular school, into a placed-based learning opportunity. Although it is beyond the purposes of the present researcher to figure out the logistics and details of this possibility, it would eliminate this particular bias.

A further limitation is that Haida Gwaii is a unique location and circumstance within B.C. The Haida make up a large portion of the population on Haida Gwaii and have developed an increasing and obvious presence on the islands. Simply put, their

presence is felt everywhere one travels, visits, shops and rests on Haida Gwaii. A future study could eliminate this limitation by selecting a different Indigenous people and context in another location of the province where the local Indigenous population does not constitute a majority of the same location's general population, or at least, whose presence is not as keenly observed.

Finally, the researcher himself is biased towards not only Indigenous people and cultures, but also Haida Gwaii, the Haida people, and reconciliation itself. Having traveled numerous times to Haida Gwaii in various capacities, the researcher has developed professional and collegial relationships with only a select group of individuals in select locations who reside there. A future study could eliminate this bias by having a neutral interviewer who did not take part in the same trip as a co-participant collect the data from the participants.

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[guidelines/Phenomenological-Research-Guidelines/](https://www.capilanou.ca/psychology/student-resources/research-guidelines/Phenomenological-Research-Guidelines/)

## Appendix A

### **Haida Gwaii Summer 2018 Application Wed July 25 – Fri Aug 3**

Attention Applicant:

*Thank you for your interest in the 2018 Haida Gwaii placed-based learning opportunity.*

*Please answer these questions thoughtfully to a maximum of 250 words per question.*

*Please understand that while we appreciate and welcome all applications, space is limited and our goal is to ensure both gender and geographical representation. Please note preference may also be given to educators who are members of the Christian Educators of BC, and are also employed in member schools of the Society of Christian Schools in BC.*

- 1) Describe your present teaching assignment.
- 2) What do you hope to gain from this Haida Gwaii experience?
- 3) Describe your past and upcoming professional development growth in regard to Indigenous people and cultures.
- 4) How might this trip benefit your students, colleagues and school?
- 5) Are you willing to commit to and participate in follow-up learning opportunities?
- 6) Are you willing to share flexible sleeping, eating and travel accommodations with fellow Christian educators?

## **Appendix B**

### **Haida Gwaii Participant Interview Questions**

1. Please describe your experience of the Haida Gwaii trip.
2. Prior to the Haida Gwaii trip, what was your understanding of Indigenous culture?
3. What is your understanding of Indigenous culture after the Haida Gwaii trip?
4. How has the Haida Gwaii trip affected your educational practice?

## Appendix C

### Haida Gwaii Interview Consent Form

#### Place Based Education and Reconciliation

**Researcher:** Jonathan Boone

**Purpose:** the interview that you are invited to participate in is part of a research study conducted by Jonathan Boone to examine the experience of participants in the Haida Gwaii summer learning trip for Christian school educators. The overall purpose of the research is to determine the relationship between a place-based learning experience and reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and Christian educators.

**Consent:** *please read carefully:*

I volunteer to participate in a survey conducted by Jonathan Boone of Smithers, B.C for the purpose of collecting information on the experience of participating in the Haida Gwaii summer learning trip in either 2017 or 2018.

I recognize that I can choose to withdraw from the survey at any given point and am under no obligation to continue to participate.

I recognize that my interview will be approximately 30 minutes long, will be audio-recorded, and that a transcript will be produced of the interview. This information will then be used confidentially in the publication of the research in a manner that does not identify participants. I understand that if I do not want to be audio-taped, I will not participate in the interview.

My name and identification will remain anonymous at all times.

If I have any questions or concerns, I understand that I can contact Jonathan Boone of Bulkley Valley Christian School at [jboone@bvcs.ca](mailto:jboone@bvcs.ca) or 250 847 4238. Additionally, I can also contact his academic supervisor Dr. Pat Kornelis of Dordt College at [Pat.Kornelis@dordt.edu](mailto:Pat.Kornelis@dordt.edu) or (712) 441-5049.

My signature below indicates that I have read this information and voluntarily agree to this interview and the research study:

Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_